

# SUBSTANCE-EXPOSED INFANTS in OUT-OF-HOME CARE

## NOTES

HEALTHY  
PEOPLE  
2010  
GOAL:  
Increase  
pregnant  
women's  
abstinence from  
cigarette smoking  
to 98%, from  
alcohol use to  
94%, and from  
illicit drug use to  
100%.

RELATED  
INDICATORS:

- Early Prenatal Care
- Low Birth Weight
- Infant Mortality
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Child Abuse Dependency Petitions
- Out-of-home Care and Adoptions

## Indicator

Substance-exposed infants in out-of-home care

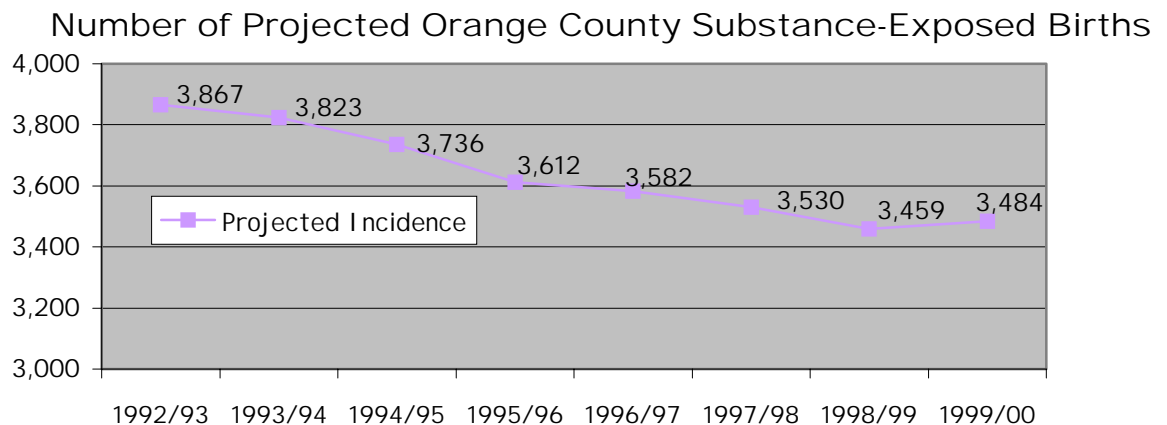
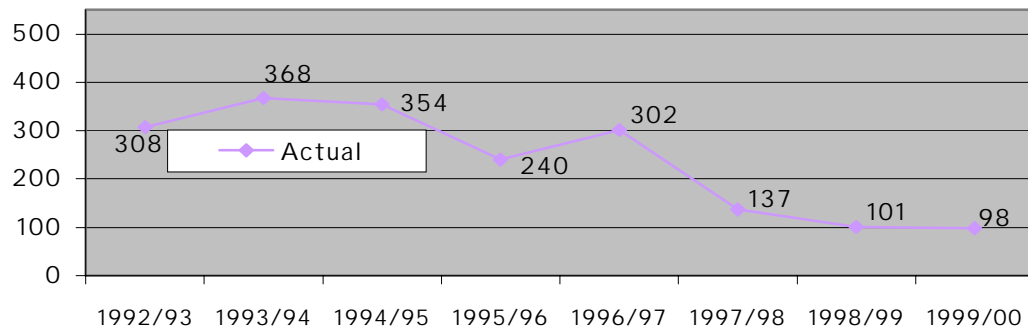
## Definition

Number of infants taken into protective custody as a result of testing positive for alcohol or drug exposure at birth.

## Findings

In FY 1999/2000, the County of Orange Social Services Agency (SSA), Children and Family Services Division, provided emergency response services that resulted in juvenile court intervention to 98 substance-exposed infants and their families. On average, 8 infants per month were placed in protective custody, usually due to the child's mother engaging in illegal drug and or alcohol related behavior while pregnant with the child, and the infant testing positive on screening at birth. In September 1999, a high of 14 infants were detained as a result of drug exposure, with a low of only 2 infants in April 2000. In 7 out of 12 months, at least 9 infants had petitions filed on their behalf due to drug exposure.

Number of Orange County Infants Taken into Protective Custody as a Result of Testing Positive for Alcohol/Drug Exposure at Birth



See "Trends" section for details of how projected incidence was calculated.

## Trends

The data available reports newborn infants who are taken into protective custody, rather than the number of infants exposed to alcohol or other drugs in utero. Nevertheless, the number of children placed into protective custody due to drug/alcohol exposure at birth appears to have notably decreased from previous years. In FY 1993/94, there was a high of 368 infants placed into custody due to drug exposure at birth. In FY 1999/2000, 98 children were placed into custody. The projected 3,484 substance exposed births on the bottom chart of page 24 is derived by multiplying the total Orange County births for a given year by a 7.49% prevalence rate. This prevalence rate is based on Orange County mothers who tested positive for alcohol and/or drug use at the time of delivery, as determined by a 1992 California Perinatal Substance Exposure Study, which used urine toxicology screenings and a random statewide sample of 30,000 mothers at the time of delivery. In comparison, the California prevalence rate in 1992 was 11.35%.

## Summary

A number of variables may contribute to this dramatic drop, which may include, but are not limited to: a) the quality and effectiveness of various outreach programs as offered through SSA, HCA and other human service agencies such as ADAS Women's Perinatal Treatment Program and the Perinatal Substance Abuse Services/ACT Program; b) physicians being more diligent in providing resources and referrals to those clients that are engaged in drug/alcohol related behavior while pregnant; c) the general public being better educated regarding the possible adverse effects of drug/alcohol use on the fetus; and d) legal changes, which now state that a positive toxicology screen, in and of itself, is not sufficient basis for reporting to the Child Abuse Registry.

## Implications

Infants born exposed to alcohol and other drugs are faced with an array of developmental, emotional and educational challenges. Early screening and intervention improves their care, treatment and development. Better data is needed on the overall incidence of substance exposure in prenatal and home environments, since the current indicator measures only those children removed, not those exposed. One means of doing this, now under consideration, is to replicate the 1992 Perinatal Substance Exposure Study, the source of projected incidence numbers on the bottom chart of page 24. Since this is an older study, it provides a partial reflection of the actual number of substance-exposed infants and replicating the study to get a more current Orange County prevalence rate for perinatal alcohol and/or drug abuse could be helpful in providing a view of the current need for prenatal care and/or juvenile court interventions.

## NOTES

### NATIONWIDE:

Of the approximately 4 million women who give birth every year, 500,000 (1 in 8) use alcohol, tobacco and/or other drugs during the week prior to delivery. This poses serious health risks to their unborn children, including fetal alcohol syndrome, premature birth, and impaired development.<sup>1</sup>

### DATA SOURCE:

Orange County Social Services Agency, "Profile of Alcohol and Drug Use During Pregnancy in California, 1992: Perinatal Substance Exposure Study," State of California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs

### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>The State of America's Children Yearbook, 1999